

BOOK REVIEWS

BASIC MEDICAL EDUCATION. By David Sinclair. (Pp. 212. £2.40). London: Oxford University Press, 1972.

IN its technical aspects medical education in the United Kingdom is traditionally amateur. Curricula conform only within the widest of guidelines; teaching methods and performances are rarely assessed; examinations are often antiquated in concept and execution and the results rarely validated; the syllabus is organised frequently with the convenience of teachers the over-riding desideratum and in its balance (*sic*) evidencing the personal interests (or prejudices!) of the most influential Faculty members; curricular duties are considered by most staff to be an avoidable chore; and until recently the Dean and his assistants (if he had any) were usually full-time academics. Some of these are inevitable given the structure of medical school staffing—professorial units are a recent creation; but others stand as indictments. In contrast the *objectives* of undergraduate education, though never inspiring a complete consensus, have been readily stated and more uniformly accepted; the responses by U.K. Schools to the Medical Act (1858), and the Flexner (1910, 1912), Goodenough (1944) and Todd Reports (1968) have been (under the permissive eye of the G.M.C.) considering the inflexibility of “institutionalised” curricula, with a few exceptions encouraging, and the new Schools in particular have been positively adventurous. Nevertheless, the aura of amateurism remains: the (American) *Journal of Medical Education* started in 1926; the *British Journal of Medical Education* only in 1967, five years after its Indian counterpart!

Increasingly this ennui is being redressed, the author of the present book contributing over two decades. The book is therefore authoritative with a practical rather than discursive style, and though necessarily superficial in some of its treatments, seems to the reviewer an admirable simple handbook for anyone with (or without) interests or responsibilities in the field. It is in three parts: Part I (4 chapters) deals briefly with the historical swing of medical education and its contemporary components—students, teachers, and Schools; Part II (4 chapters) considers curricula, learning and teaching methods, means of assessment, and the problem of introducing a new syllabus; and Part III (one chapter) is a general appraisal. There are appendices on specimen curricula (including that from Western Reserve), a 246 item bibliography, and an excellent index. The writing is clear, succinct, and in places the writer sustains an agreeable narrative style. In fact on all counts a successful single volume overview for the general Faculty member of many of the practical points of teaching and examining modern medical undergraduates.

P.F.

LEGAL ASPECTS OF MEDICAL PRACTICE. By Bernard Knight. (Pp.viii + 280, 33 illustrations. £3.00). Edinburgh and London: Churchill Livingstone, 1972.

IN this new book the author, an experienced forensic pathologist of considerable standing in medico-legal circles, breaks fresh ground. Unlike many of his predecessors, who were inclined to base their textbooks largely on illustrated examples of their own unique cases and whose manuscripts often included stereotyped, out-of-date material, Dr. Knight has approached his task with originality. As he states in the preface, “For too long the medical schools have been teaching forensic *pathology* at the expense of forensic *medicine*.” He points out that the former is a specialised post-graduate subject, whereas the real need of the student, junior doctor and general practitioner is a sound knowledge of medical ethics, an awareness of the laws and regulations concerning medical practice, and an appreciation of the disciplinary and legal consequences of irregular behaviour on the part of the doctor.

With the aim of fulfilling this need, the author has packed a great deal of information into what is really quite a small volume. He gets off to a good start with a chapter on medical ethics, from the ancient Hippocratic Oath to the modern day, and then takes us through the chambers of the General Medical Council, showing us how to avoid contact, in the

disciplinary sense, by his chapters on medical negligence, consent, certification, and the doctor's duty to his employer. Further chapters enlighten us on compensation, the Coroner and the Courts, and the duties of a doctor at the scene of death. There is an interesting, albeit brief, discussion on the topical issue of organ transplantation.

In the clinical chapters of the book Dr. Knight deals in a most interesting way with sudden natural and unnatural death, wounds, motor vehicle injuries, asphyxia, drowning, sexual and allied offences, etc. These are useful contributions on such important current issues as sudden infant death ("cot death"), the battered baby syndrome, the drinking driver, drug legislation and the legal aspects of mental disorders.

The book concludes with a summary of the major changes in death certification and coroner's procedure recommended by the Brodrick Committee in their long-awaited report. (No action has as yet been taken by the Government so that the proposed changes, many of which have aroused controversy, are still pending).

No photographs are to be found within the book but their absence is more than compensated for by a series of original and somewhat novel diagrams, which go far towards summarising the subject matter of the text. These should prove particularly pleasing to the student reader! Throughout, the book is concise, practical, well-written and, above all, interesting. It should be read by every senior student, indeed by every doctor regardless of his particular interest or speciality, since in these days of increasing litigation, coupled with a decline in the teaching of forensic medicine, the potential for costly mistakes is indeed great. Moderately priced at £3.00, the book offers good value for money. My personal hope is that in the editions which must surely follow, the author may be persuaded to consider in greater depth some of the fascinating topical issues to which he has introduced us in his first edition.

D.J.L.C.

AN INTRODUCTION TO HUMAN PHYSIOLOGY. By G. H. Green, Third Edition. (Pp. 232. Illustrated. £2.20). London: Oxford University Press, 1972.

The appearance of the third edition of this short text a decade after the appearance of the first edition is a clear indication of its popularity. It is the sort of book that teachers of physiology rarely recommend but students of physiology persist in buying. From the teacher's point of view it appears didactic, dull and truncated; from the student's point of view it appears short, cheap, clear and adequate in content for passing examinations. Truth probably lies somewhere in the middle ground. Its main value is in providing what the title expresses as an "introduction" to human physiology. In the first approach to a subject a surfeit of information may confuse rather than clarify.

There are only minor differences between the third edition and the second. Some newer topics such as prostaglandins and cyclic AMP are now included and all units have been converted to the S.I. unit system. The successful style and format have been retained. However, the cover is blue instead of yellow.

I.C.R.

PHYSIOLOGY, A CLINICAL APPROACH. By G. R. Kelman, M.D., Ph.D., M.R.C.P.(Ed.). (Pp. 188, Illustrated. £1.25). Edinburgh and London: Churchill Livingstone, 1972.

THERE has been growing tendency in the last few decades to think about disease in terms of breakdown of normal function rather than in terms of the end results of the pathological change. Though the latter approach is necessary in diagnosing disease by pattern recognition, the former approach permits a greater understanding of the disease and puts the doctor in a much better position to think intelligently about its prognosis and treatment.

This short and well written book will be helpful to doctors and students who are interested in the latter approach. The book describes the physiological consequences of organ failure as it affects the cardiovascular, respiratory, renal, haemopoietic and other systems. The section on the nervous system, which was not written by Professor Kelman is rather different.